

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 2, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: DT 4:1-2, 6-8

Moses said to the people:

"Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin upon you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it. Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, 'This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.'

For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

Responsorial Psalm: PS 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

R. (1a) The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the LORD.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things shall never be disturbed.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Second Reading: JAS 1:17-18, 21B-22, 27

Dearest brothers and sisters:

All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom

there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Gospel: MK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

—For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds. —

So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?"

He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

"From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Watching her mother struggle, a single girl asked why it was necessary to cut the bone off the piece of meat before putting it in the pot to roast. The mother replied, "That's the way my mother did it." Later the girl asked her grandmother the same question, only to be given the same answer, "That's the way my mother did it." Somewhat intrigued to know the real reason, she placed a long-distance call to her great-grandmother asking the same question. This time she got a different answer, "Because it was too big for the pot I had." We chuckle at how this practical solution inadvertently became established as a meaningless tradition from one generation to the next.

The following statement succinctly captures Jesus' teaching in this week's Gospel reading by explaining, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."¹ Jesus is speaking in this week's Gospel passage about the dangers of traditionalism. He rebukes the Pharisees, not for the proper adherence to tradition, but for their traditionalism. As Catholics our lives and worship are marked by tradition, and unfortunately for some it has become traditionalism. Tradition is and should be a good and healthy aspect of our lives, leading us to Jesus and amplifying his teaching. The value of tradition is emphasized by Jesus' example as he observed the religious traditions of Judaism. The last supper Jesus had with his disciples took place amidst his observing of the Passover tradition. It was during this observance that Jesus instituted the sacrament and tradition of the Eucharistic meal. So we know from his life that Jesus was not opposed to valuable traditions, but rather to the hypocrisy of traditionalism.

The point of Jesus' rebuke was the Pharisees' hypocritical concern about minute, man-made details of religious observances, while simultaneously harboring hearts overflowing with deceit and sin. Sacred Scripture tells us that God does not look on the outward appearances, but rather looks on the heart. So God is not fooled by outward shows of religiosity, though people sometimes are.

Romano Guardini, in his book *The Lord*, discusses the dangers of traditionalism by explaining, "A special caste, that of the scribes, the protectors of the Law, grew up around it. They probed its meaning, interpreted and applied it. They surrounded every paragraph with explanations and observations, which in turn gradually assumed the character of new laws, so that in the course of time a fine strong net held the whole of life in its meshes.

"... To this was added that which Jesus mentions with such heaviness of heart; hypocrisy and cant. On the outside, greatest delicacy of conscience; on the inside, hardness of heart. Outer loyalty to the Law; inner sin—and sin without admission of sin, with neither contrition nor the desire for salvation (Matt. 15:7; 22:19; 23:13-35). Such then the attitude with which Jesus was confronted." ²

Legitimate traditions, which are primarily manifest through outward expressions, are not to be abandoned, but rather to be understood as a means of transforming our heart and life. Tradition when practiced wisely, and wholeheartedly helps us examine and prepare our heart, reflect on the condition of our heart, and can lead our heart to Jesus and his teachings. Tradition should be a means of growth and grace and not simply used to validate a life with God which either doesn't exist or which exists in a

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sorry state of disrepair. To avoid traditionalism, we need not know where every tradition originated but like the young girl in the illustration, we must seek to know why we practice a tradition, and then practice it from the heart.

1 The Vindication of Tradition, by Jaroslav Pelikan.

2 The Lord, by Romano Guardini, (pages 195, 198).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. How should traditional religious observances impact others?

Second Reading

2. What are the true marks of godly religion?
3. What does the phrase “humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you” mean to you?

Gospel Reading

4. How would you define hypocrisy?
5. What kind of non-religious family traditions does your family observe?
6. What religious traditions do you observe that you would like to understand more fully?
7. Give an example of how a tradition, when observed correctly, could positively impact a person’s heart.

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.